



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Abuse hurts at any age; hotline available to report elder abuse *Elder Abuse Prevention Month observed in May*

Richmond, VA — Many senior citizens in Virginia and the country face a growing problem – elder abuse. Governor Timothy Kaine has signed a proclamation recognizing May as Elder Abuse Prevention Month in the Commonwealth.

“Elder Abuse Prevention Month offers all Virginians the opportunity to remember victims of elder abuse and their families, to promote the programs and organizations that serve them and to participate in community efforts to improve the safety and well-being of all people throughout the Commonwealth,” Governor Kaine said in the proclamation.

Each year, nearly two million Americans are victims of adult abuse in domestic settings. Nearly 14,000 incidents of suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of the elderly and adults with disabilities were reported last year to the Virginia Department of Social Services’ (VDSS) Adult Protective Services (APS) office and local APS units. These reports of mistreatment of frail or incapacitated persons were substantiated in 52 percent of the cases in fiscal year 2006.

“Though the abuse of vulnerable adults is not a new phenomenon, it has long been cloaked in silence and has not had the public visibility that abuse of children has had. Some research indicates that abuse of vulnerable adults is as prevalent as the abuse of children; however, adult abuse is vastly underreported. Local APS units investigate allegations of adult abuse and provide services to stop or alleviate the mistreatment of our senior citizens and disabled adults and to protect them,” VDSS Commissioner Anthony Conyers Jr. said.

APS also received more than 2,800 reports last year of abuse in facilities such as nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and facilities for the treatment of mental illness or mental retardation.

“Adults who are vulnerable to mistreatment are frequently isolated and less likely to have their plight discovered by an interested outsider. Many who are victimized go unreported and unaided,” said VDSS APS Program Manager Gail Nardi. “The most likely victims in Virginia are women, persons age 75 or older and individuals who are isolated and dependent on others for care,” she added.

The most common cases are those of self-neglect and neglect, meaning failure to provide basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, proper hygiene, financial management, healthcare, medications, adequate shelter and the basics to stay physically and mentally healthy. Neglect often happens when a caregiver becomes overwhelmed.

Other types of abuse include:

- Physical — intentional infliction of physical pain or injury
- Mental — intentional infliction of mental anguish through threats, intimidation, humiliation, control, harassment or other means
- Sexual — intentional infliction of unwanted sexual activity
- Financial exploitation — illegal use of an incapacitated adult's resources for another's profit or advantage

Victims of adult abuse are from all income levels, races and ethnic backgrounds. APS can arrange assistance for victims through various programs such as emergency assistance, adult day care, counseling, home support and residential services.

The designation of May as Elder Abuse Prevention Month is focused on informing Virginia's citizens of adult abuse and the role they can play in combating this abuse. Some signs of elder abuse and neglect include, but are not limited to:

- Poor hygiene
- Body/bed sores
- Inadequate living situations, including unsafe or unsanitary housing, lack of running water, electricity or heat and the absence of the basic necessities for healthy living including food, medical care and medications
- Bruises, injuries and/or burns
- Isolation
- Mismanagement of finances by a relative or friend or the disappearance of belongings

Many professionals, such as healthcare workers, law enforcement agents and emergency services personnel, are mandated to report suspected elder abuse under Virginia law. "However, it's up to every one of us in Virginia to look out for the elderly and disabled and to help end the abuse," Commissioner Conyers said.

APS has a 24-hour toll-free hotline open to the public to report suspected elder or adult abuse: 1-888-83-ADULT (1-888-832-3858). Callers do not have to give their names. Reports can also be made through your local department of social services.

For a more comprehensive list of warning signs to look for, mandated reporters, ways you can help, and more information, visit:

http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/as/prevention_month.cgi

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Interviews are available upon request. For additional story ideas and for information on how your media outlet can help raise awareness of elder abuse, contact Carla Harris, VDSS, (804) 726-7107 or carla.harris@dss.virginia.gov.

